

ABSTRACT

This study explored children's perceptions of death from a Piagetian perspective. While a few international studies exist which have explored this issue, it was deemed useful to evaluate the perceptions of South African children. It seems that many researchers have not taken into account the importance of broader contextual experience in children's perceptions of death, and it was felt that the current high death rate in South Africa may impact on both or either the rate and level at which children start to engage with and understand the concept of death. The participants of the current study were between the ages of five and twelve years, and were drawn from a Gauteng Place of Safety and a preschool. Individual, structured interviews were conducted on this cross-sectional population. The interviews contained questions adapted from Koocher's (1973) research in this area, and responses were analysed by means of a traditional content analysis. It was found that children had a basic understanding of death concepts by the age of approximately seven years old. It was also found that the youngest age group of children possess an awareness of death, but tend to view it as reversible and not final. An understanding of the finality of death emerges around the age of seven. In general, the participant's responses showed a close relationship between Piaget's stages of cognitive development and how the young child reasons about death.